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Front cover painting by H. W. McCauley, illustrating a scene from "Genie of Bagdad." Back cover painting by Malcolm Smith, depicting "Warriors of Other Worlds." Illustrations by Robert Fuqua; Magarian; Rod Ruth; Robert Gibson Jones; Julian S. Krupa

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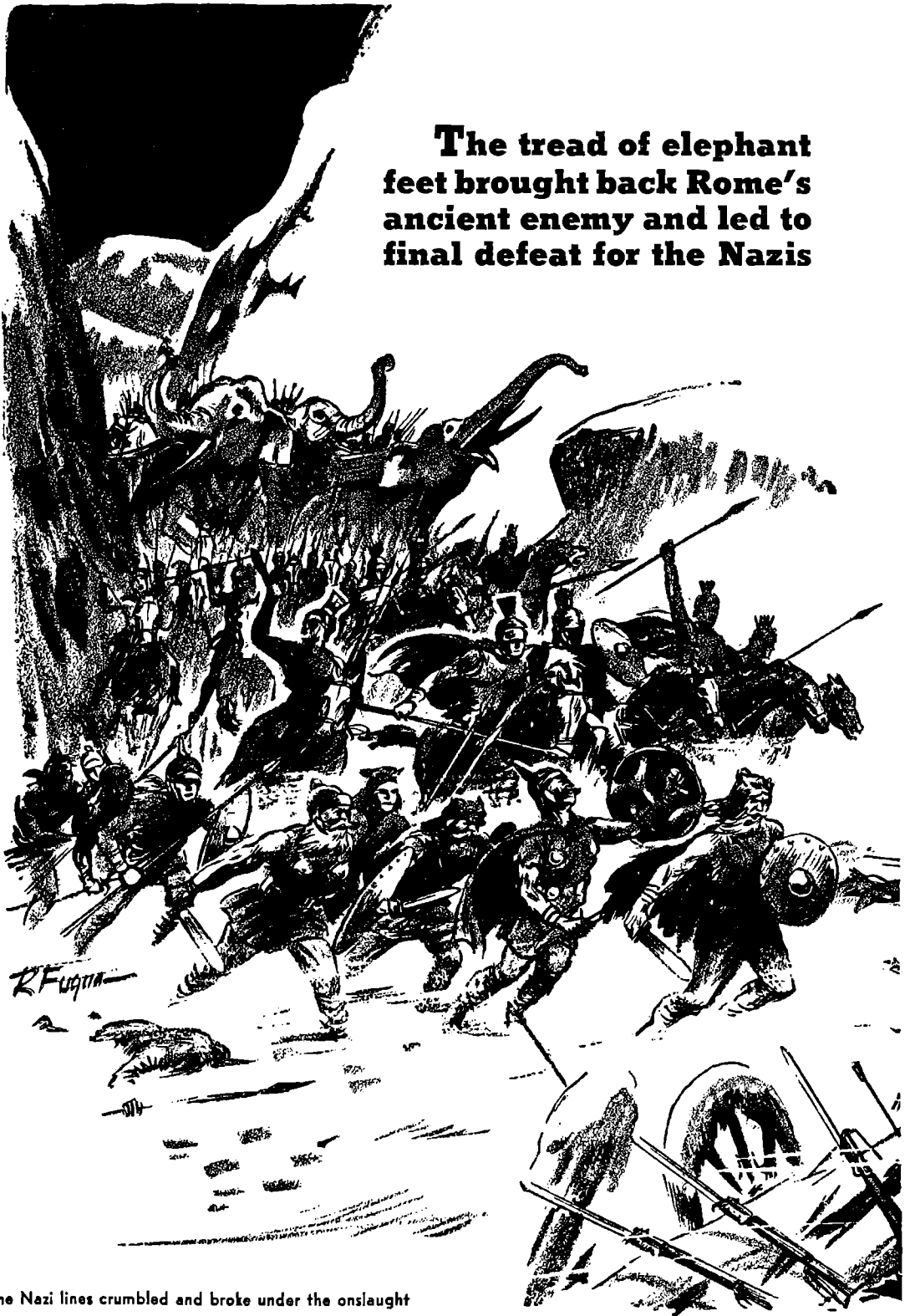
William B. Ziff, Publisher; Howard Browne, Assistant Editor; B. G. Davis, Editor; Herman R. Bollin, Art Director; Raymond A. Palmer, Managing Editor; H. G. Strong, Circulation Director.

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FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. Washington Office, Earle B. King, Washington, D. C. Special Washington representative, Col. Harold E. Hartney, Occidental Hotel. London editorial representative, A. Spencer Allberry, Chandos Cottage, Court Road, Ickenham, Uxbridge, Middx., England. Entered as second-class matter April 16, 1940, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscription \$2.50 a year (12 issues); Canada, \$3.00; Foreign, \$3.50. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

The tread of elephant feet brought back Rome's ancient enemy and led to final defeat for the Nazis



The Nazi lines crumbled and broke under the onslaught

LOST LEGIONS OF CARTHAGE

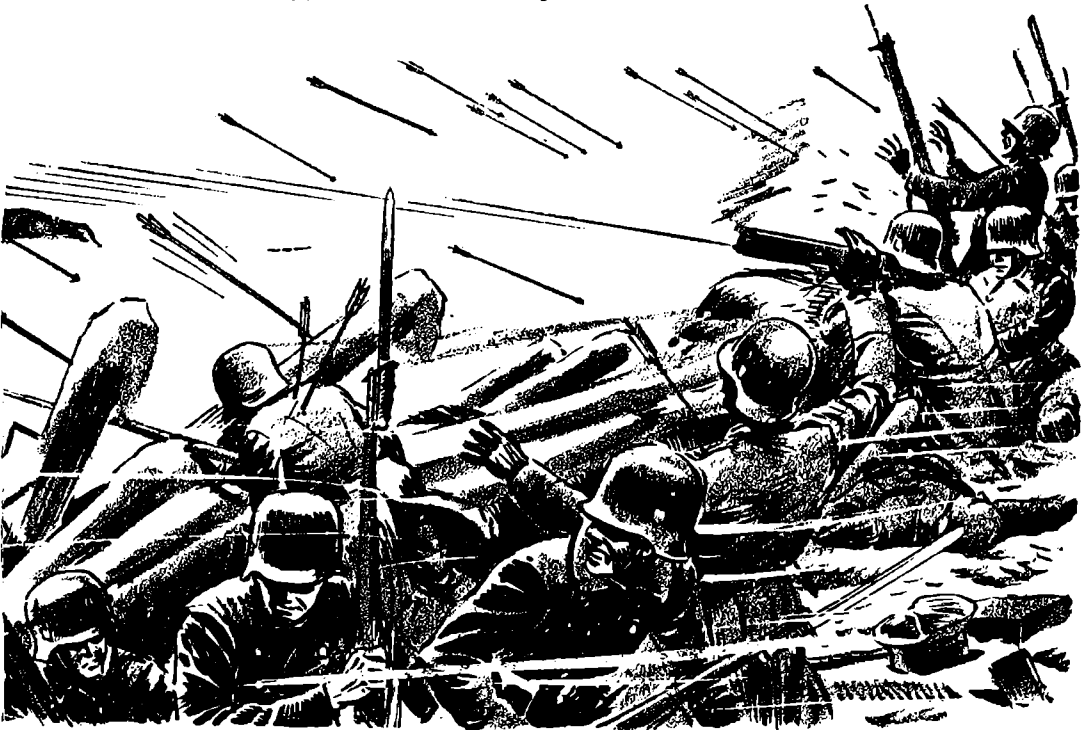
By Leroy Yerna

IT WAS night, and snow swirled downward in white blankets from the cliffs above the Nazi camp. The pass itself was quiet, except for the cutting wind that howled through the tents.

Three guards had been stationed where they could look down over the warm, moonlighted Valley of Duric. Frederick Gothaven looked away from the fire suddenly, drew his head deeper

into the frayed coat and stared moodily at his companion. The third man was pacing up and down a few feet away. The fire light glistened on the cold barrel of his rifle and his frozen boots clumped up and down mechanically as he walked.

"Hans, I'm tired of sitting on ice each night while that pig-faced von Ristoben sleeps in his tank under warm blankets."



Hans Welkin shot a frightened look about them in the darkness.

"You must not talk that way about our leader," he whispered. "Von Ristoben would punish you if he heard . . ."

He drew a stiff finger across his throat from ear to ear and made a bitter face.

The pacing guard came toward them from the darkness. He was cursing the cold softly. Fog poured from his mouth as he breathed.

It happened then—suddenly.

"Zinnng!"

A look of horror crossed the guard's face and he pitched forward into the soft snow. A long, feathered shaft stood upright in his back.

Slow, stolid Hans Welkin arose and went toward him. Hans was young. He thought only of his comrade lying there with the arrow in his back.

"Zinnng!"

The shrill twang of a bowstring sounded again, closer. Welkin clutched his heart. A third arrow whizzed from the side of the cliff and pinned his hand to his chest. With a frightened sob he went down.

Frederick Gothaven had thought much faster than the others. With a wild lunge he threw himself out of the fire light and rolled over and over in the snow, then lay still. No sound but the moans of the dying men came to him. He started to crawl toward the tank of General von Ristoben.

The pass was silent again. Gothaven wanted to cry out an alarm. The thought of those arrows finding him here on his belly aroused an animal fear inside him.

Somewhere on the edge of a camp a horse whinnied softly. There were no horses here—only tanks and trucks. The sound sent him forward swiftly.

He reached the tank. His fingers closed over the ice on the tread. His

heart was pounding as though it would break through the heavy coat that covered him. Frederick Gothaven started to pull himself upward, hugging the hard steel. The moon broke through ragged clouds above the pass, pinning him in its light, unable to move.

"Zinnng!"

A wooden shaft sank into his side and he toppled backward into the snow. Pain clouded his eyes as he tried to jerk the arrow out. He dared not shout for help lest they know he was alive and shoot again. He lay still finally, panting with fear.

The first row of horsemen cantered over the ridge, lances gleaming in the moonlight. These were strange men with high crowned helmets and sheathed swords. There were no saddles on the horses that advanced in a long, even line straight toward the group of dark tents. Animal skins covered the broad sweating flanks of the animals and their hoofs sent streamers of snow flying into the air.

Hot blood flashed through Frederick Gothaven's body and he fainted. General Jon von Ristoben slept for several minutes after Gothaven had fallen. Finally awakened by the screams of his own men, the puffy-eyed Nazi lifted himself from the turret of the tank. He died ingloriously in his underwear, an eight foot spear buried in his thick Teutonic skull.

CHAPTER II

Death's Calling Card

REX WALLACE, foreign correspondent of the *Chicago Blade* entered the war-crushed city of Milan, late in August. "Snub" Edwards, his photographer, flew with him direct from Tunis. They winged in by army plane high above the occupied city of Rome

and reached Milan just before sundown.

Wallace had walked half way across Libya to be with the American forces when they entered Tunis. He had dropped with the paratroops on Sicily, and typed a cable dispatch on Mussolini's big desk when Rome fell under Allied control. Rex Wallace's tall, awkward body, slightly flattened nose and thatch of red hair said little for his ability. Yet he had scooped every paper in the States with his story of the Italian dictator's downfall.

Wallace had been able to cable increasingly good reports of the Allied fighters since early spring. The same troops and bombers that had mopped up Tunis and North Africa, were now sweeping unchecked into Northern Italy. In three months the Italian people had overthrown paunchy Mussolini and harried the Gestapo into retreating from the warm plains.

Sicily had been captured and the Italian fleet destroyed. Rome went down under R.A.F. block-busters and the German High Command retreated into the Swiss and French Alps. With the Allied Command established in Milan, bombers roared from the flat countryside on their mission to Berlin. Covered with a haze of war smoke, Milan itself died at the hands of the retreating Nazis. The Cathedral of Milan was leveled to the ground.

With Russia pounding through Poland, and England keeping Hitler's youngest troops busy in France, the final round was ready to start. Rex Wallace wanted the story and pix of the first American boys to enter the German Reich.

As Rex Wallace watched the pilot prepare for a landing, he fully realized the preparations in the making for the Allied push. United Nations' trucks, planes and heavy equipment were

everywhere. From the south across flat, fertile plains, long lines of trucks jammed the roads and lost themselves on the horizon. The city itself was alive with activity.

The plane hit the runway, kicked up lightly and settled down again for the run to the far end of the field.

"Seems good to be on the ground again," Wallace said.

Snub Edwards stared at him through his good left eye, scratched the heavy blond stubble on his chin and groaned.

"The good earth, huh? After crawling over every inch of North Africa I'm fed up with hard ground. Give me a cloud to sit on any day in the week."

Wallace unfolded slowly and stood up. He had to hunch forward and bow his head under the low roof of the cabin.

"If we get out of this mess *without* sitting on a cloud, we'll be lucky."

The plane stopped, twisted around and the motors gunned up and died.

"Any Italian babes left in this place?" Snub asked. "I need my brow soothed or something."

Wallace was looking for someone on the field.

"Better ask Hitler," he answered bitterly. *He's* taken care of that department."

THEY waited as the pilot handed down two small bags, a typewriter case and Snub's photography equipment. A small car dashed out from the hangar and bumped to a stop beside the plane. The soldier who drove had a clean face and a grin that stamped Middle West all over him.

He poked his head out the open window.

"You're Rex Wallace, I take it?"
"Right!"

The driver waited until the luggage

had been stored in the rear seat.

"The General sent for you," he said as they climbed in. "You're to see him at once."

A low whistle escaped Wallace's lips. Snub winked at him wisely.

"Looks like big time stuff again," Snub offered. "No more front line, I hope. I'm getting tender."

He didn't look it. Snub Edwards had arms and fists that were twice their necessary proportions. Anything he could see with that one good eye would go down once he battered at it long enough.

Wallace took a cigarette from his pack, gave one to Snub and passed the remaining smokes to the soldier.

"Where you from?" he asked.

"Chicago," the boy answered. "I got a date in Berlin now, and I'll be there long enough to settle a lot of things."

They drew up before an ornate office building. Half of it had been bombed to dust and the remainder was stacked to the second floor with a wall of sand bags.

"Right through the front door," the driver said. "And thanks a lot for the cigarettes."

Wallace left Snub with the luggage and entered the main lobby. He leaned his ungainly weight over the desk in the hall and a staff officer arose and took his hand.

"Rex Wallace," the correspondent said. "General John Lathers sent for me."

"Pleased to meet you, Wallace. My name's Saunders. Heard about your work in Tunis. Lathers is waiting."

"Thanks," Wallace said.

They went together down the long hall and Saunders stopped before a plate glass door. He knocked softly.

"Come in." The voice beyond the door was low and crisp. Saunders

held the door open.

"Rex Wallace is here, General," he said.

Lathers bounded out of his chair and rounded the desk hurriedly.

"Rex! Damn it, man, but it's good to see you."

Lathers was a small man, his service shirt open at the throat, sleeves rolled. Without the wealth of gray hair, he would have passed as a smoothly shaven boy of twenty-five. His actual age was a question but the service listed him as forty-five.

Wallace heard the door behind him close and he took Lathers' hand firmly. They stood grinning at each other.

"I got your message in Tunis," Wallace said awkwardly. "I won't pretend I'm not flattered by this attention. You've been very kind in the past, but . . ."

Lathers waved his hand impatiently.

"Forget the General to the Reporter stuff, Rex," he begged. "There was a time I'd have thrown you out of Africa if I could have found you. You've done some fine work since then. I need you."

Wallace leaned forward eagerly.

"The big job?" he asked. "Is it about ready to start?"

LATHERS sat down abruptly and the smile faded from his face.

"I'm afraid the Germans won't see us in Berlin this year," he said. "We've reached a deadlock."

Wallace stared at him. His oddly flattened nose quivered angrily.

"Our planes are pounding Germany apart," he said. "The Germans must be ripe for invasion."

Lathers drew a map from his desk.

"Look," he said, putting a finger down on the French Alps. "Hitler has holed in from the Ligurian Sea to the Adriatic."

He traced a half circle around the top of Italy, through the entire ring of mountains. "It's going to take months to blast him out."

"But the Swiss and French," Wallace protested. "We counted on help."

Lathers sank back, a drawn expression on his face. The office was silent. Outside a heavy truck sank into mud, its engine roaring loudly as it pulled out and passed from hearing.

"You had a good reason for calling me here," Wallace said finally. "What can I do?"

Lathers stood up. He went to the window and looked outside. Finally he returned and placed a firm hand on Rex Wallace's shoulder.

"Rex, you and I have imagination. The work we do demands that we keep open minds. I wouldn't tell another man on earth what I'm going to tell you. They'd laugh me off the map."

"Wait a minute." To say that Wallace was surprised would be putting it mildly. General John L. Lathers was a hard-headed fighter. Men simply didn't laugh, regardless of what he said. "It's not that bad, I'm sure."

"Wait until you hear me out," Lathers urged. "It started last week. A small patrol of my men were found dead just south of the St. Bernard Pass. Six ski patrol men were found with spears driven into their bodies. At first I thought the Germans . . ."

"Hold it," Wallace begged. "Did you say *spears*?"

Lathers nodded grimly.

"I told you you'd have a chance to exercise imagination. Only a few men know of this. They've been told to forget it. The spears were delivered to me. They are stout poles with pointed, bronze heads. Rex, unless the Nazis are trying to frighten us with something new they've cooked up, I'm afraid I have no explanation."

"It sounds as though that were the case," Wallace admitted slowly.

Lathers chuckled.

"I disproved *that* theory also," he answered. "We've got a German prisoner here. He's in the hospital at present. The boy, Frederick Gothaven he calls himself, is suffering from an arrow wound in the right side."

Wallace stood up quickly.

"I don't get it," he confessed. "Bows and arrows, spears—what next?"

"Gothaven was picked up in the foothills of the French Alps," Lathers went on.

"He had crawled the better part of ten miles on his stomach. He was so badly frightened that he was ready to tell everything he knew by the time we patched him up. He says his whole battalion was camped in a pass. That they were attacked by horsemen, and the entire battalion destroyed."

"But horsemen in the high Alps," Wallace objected. "It's fantastic."

Lathers nodded.

"Exactly," he agreed. "But we can't overlook the spears, and the arrow head we dug out of Gothaven's side. Something big is on the way, Rex, and I want you to find out what it is."

Wallace smiled.

"If I'm not careful," he admitted, "I'll be cabling stories to the *Blade* about mysterious horsemen who gallop among the Alps and kill men with bows and arrows. I can't do that."

"Not yet," Lathers answered dryly. "But I'm not so sure you won't before we're through with this thing. Rex, I've a perfect description of these men from the Nazi, Gothaven. They may be hill people, out to get loot from both sides. In any case, I want to find them and learn who the leader is. If they can wipe out the Nazis the way this German boy says they can, they'd do a

lot of good for our side. What do you say?"

Wallace hesitated and Lathers went on.

"I can't send my own men. The army just doesn't go for these fairy tales. We don't have a chance to get through the mountains this fall unless . . ."

"Unless I get these mysterious spear throwers on our side?"

"That's it," Lathers agreed. "If they do exist and could coincide their attacks with ours we might break through one of the lower passes and get our heavy stuff where we can use it. That's the story, Rex. Will you try it?"

WALLACE went to the desk and opened the box that held Lathers' cigarettes. He lighted one thoughtfully, took a long drag.

"I want to be in on the big show," he said. "Take a crack at it."

"We haven't a chance of getting through another way," Lathers said. "If by any wild chance this boy Gothaven knows what he's talking about, you may be pretty much in the center of things from the start."

"This Frederick Gothaven," Wallace asked. "May I see him?"

Lathers frowned and the corners of his mouth turned down bitterly.

"I saved this until the last because I wanted you to say 'yes' before I frightened you," he answered. "Gothaven died last night. He was alone in his room. When the nurse went in at midnight she found this buried in his heart."

He drew from his pocket a short-bladed dagger. The handle was of horn, crudely wrapped with leather thongs. A small piece of parchment like paper still clung to the hilt. Wallace took the weapon, turned it in his

hand and slipped the paper off the blade. The characters were Latin, written in laborious fashion.

"That none shall remain, to betray us."

Wallace looked up until his eyes, dark and smouldering, were on Lathers.

"I like a challenge," he said quietly. "If you'll provide transportation to Turin and proper credentials I'd like to spend a few days in the French Alps."

Lathers took his hand warmly.

"Just make sure you don't end up with that same message," he said, pointing at the dagger.

CHAPTER III

"None Shall Remain . . ."

PAPA BOISE, owner of the Alpine Chalet was not happy this morning. He had felt little of the war until now. As he anticipated, the Nazis had finally come through the pass and gone far back into the mountains to establish their camps. Their coming had been hurried, and Papa Boise's family was not harmed.

This morning, the old man stood on the level ground before the lodge, watching the valley below with a pair of aged binoculars. Fresh snow covered the ground and the sun was bright against it. His eyes ached from the glare and his heart pumped very hard.

He had not told his daughter, Frances, of what he had seen last night. Close to midnight he had heard voices at the back of the lodge. It had taken long minutes for him to gain enough courage to slip from his long night shirt and climb into heavy clothing. When he finally rounded the wood-house the voices were gone. Fresh footprints and warm horse droppings were around the well.

Shivering from more than the cold,

Papa Boise had returned to bed where he spent the remainder of the night without closing his eyes.

Returning the glass to his pocket, the old man went toward the kitchen. He saw Frances drawing water from the well and thanked the Saints for sending more snow to cover the footprints. He prayed silently that the men would not return.

"Papa! Papa!" It was Frances, her voice alive with sudden excitement. "There are men coming down the road."

Papa Boise ran to the kitchen and brought out his old Swiss rifle. It was true. Two men were laboring slowly through deep snow in the road. The tall one carried a heavy pack. The short man behind him carried two rifles and a heavy-looking black box. The man in front had bright red hair and a misshapen nose.

Rex Wallace reached the top of the hill and started to cross the flat ground toward the alpine lodge. The sun blinded him until an old man's voice rang out.

"Halt! Who are you? What do you want here?"

Wallace stopped short, shading his eyes.

"The old guy's got a rifle," Snub Edwards warned.

Wallace kept on walking.

"We're Americans," he sang out. "Looking for a place to stay a few nights. The people in the village said you'd put us up."

Papa Boise dropped his rifle and smiled. His gums were toothless and pink. The girl at his side, Wallace thought, couldn't be over twenty. She was comely and had bright red cheeks. A pail of water stood at her side.

"You are welcome to what we have," Papa Boise said and held out his hand. "We are lonely people here and very

few come our way. This is my daughter, Frances."

Frances dipped in a little curtsy and smiled shyly. Her eyes met Wallace's, flashing and friendly.

"I am happy that you are here," she said simply.

Without further words, Papa Boise took the water pail, and turning his back on them, went toward the lodge.

"Let me carry that for you." Wallace took the heavy pail from him and they walked toward the door that led to the kitchen. Don't go to any trouble on my account. This is Snub Edwards."

"Papa Boise nodded toward the one-eyed Snub, and they went into the warm kitchen.

"Frances will prepare your room," Papa Boise said. "Meanwhile, you would like to eat?"

BEFORE nightfall, Rex Wallace knew about the Boise family. Mama Boise it seemed had been dead for many years. Since the war, they never entertained at the chalet. No one cared to ski in the Alps with machine guns hidden in every pass.

Late in the evening Frances led them to the second floor and held a lamp while they approved of the tiny room with the big feather bed. She stayed a little longer than necessary, watching Rex Wallace with round eyes as he drew two revolvers from under his coat and put them carefully by the bed.

"You look for trouble?" Her lips parted slightly and she retreated toward the door. "You may find it here. Papa saw the tracks of horses and men by the well last night. He did not tell me, but they were there under the fresh snow this morning."

"Horses?" Wallace tried to control his voice. "How many? Tell me

about them."

The girl was confused.

"I have already said too much," she protested. "Papa would not like me to be so friendly with strangers. It is just that I like . . ."

She blushed prettily and ran away down the hall.

"Well I'll be damned," Snub Edwards said. "Looks like excitement already."

Wallace was silent for several minutes as he undressed by the light of the lamp. When they were at last in bed, he blew out the flame and lay stretched out on his back.

"From now on we'll look twice before we move," he said slowly. "I've a hunch those horses may get thirsty again."

Snub was already snoring at his side. Exhausted by the long day's climb, Wallace rolled on his side. Then, remembering the guns, he reached for them in the darkness and placed them close to him.

In the darkness beyond the chalet, a single sentry watched the room on the second floor. He stood knee deep in the snow, his horse standing with head down against the wind. The man had long hair that reached down to cover his eyes. He was dressed in the skin of an ox, and as the lamp-light flickered and went out, he thrust his thick, hairy arms high into the air in a prearranged signal.

Ten horsemen rode in single file down the tiny gully behind the chalet. Spears trailed from their right hands, and their bodies were matted with snow.

Papa and Frances Boise were still in the kitchen when the mysterious horsemen came. They had no chance to cry out, but were overpowered and gagged with desperate speed. The column of horsemen then retreated as

quietly as they had come, carrying two hostages. Where and why they were going, the frightened young girl and the humble old man could not guess.

In the door of the kitchen a short-bladed knife had been driven deep. A small note was attached to the handle, a message to others who were to come.

"That none shall remain to betray us."

CHAPTER IV

". . . to Betray Us"

REX WALLACE awakened refreshed and eager for the day ahead. He poked Snub not too gently in his thickly padded ribs and was rewarded with a sleepy grunt.

"I got a funny feeling," Snub said, rubbing his eyes, "that something's wrong around here. No heat, no breakfast in bed . . ."

Wallace winced as his bare feet struck the cold floor. He made quick work of dressing.

"They're probably sleeping late," he said. "The old man must be pretty feeble. As for Frances, she must get *plenty* of beauty sleep."

The kitchen, when they entered it, was cold and deserted. Dirty dishes were still stacked on the table.

"I still say there's something wrong," Snub insisted. "I got a sixth sense or somethin'. It ain't like the girl to leave a mess like this."

Wallace *was* worried in spite of himself. He glanced at his watch. It was already ten o'clock. The pair should have been about hours ago.

"Knock at all the doors along the lower hall," he said. "I'm going to take a look outside."

He pushed the door open, saw the tracks in the snow and turned about quickly.

"Snub!" His voice was hard. "Get out here on the double!"

The one-eyed photographer came on the run.

The snow in the yard showed many hoof prints. They led in a straight line toward the gully behind the chalet and into the mountain beyond. When Wallace turned again to Snub Edwards, there was smouldering hatred in the reporter's gray eyes.

"The same gang of killers," he said. "Why they kidnaped the girl and the old man I can't guess, but, if necessary, I'll cross the Alps on foot to find out."

Twenty minutes later they were packed. They had eaten hurriedly. Wallace led the way across the open spot behind the chalet and up the ravine. The tracks were still clearly visible and the sun was bright and warm above.

"Crack!"

Wallace's hand on Snub's shoulder halted the little man suddenly.

"Wait!"

"Crack! Crack! Crack!"

The sharp echo of rifle shots came down from the hills. A motor roared into action and far away voices rose in anger and fear.

"Back to the lodge," Wallace said quickly. "There's an armed force up there. They must be fighting it out. We'd better lay low until the excitement dies down."

They reached the door barely in time. A huge truck twisted down the snow-drifted road and hurtled in a wide circle toward the chalet. Men were pouring from it before the engine stopped.

Wallace pushed Snub through the kitchen door hurriedly and followed after him.

"The second floor," he whispered. "There may be more of them."

THEY pounded up the stairs and ran into the room they had occupied the night before. Wallace had been right. Two more trucks followed the first. They were covered with canvas tarps and a huge swastika was painted on the side of each.

A loud command cut the air and they watched the Nazi officer striding from one truck to the next, supervising the unloading. Machine guns came down and were quickly assembled. Fog poured from the mouths of the soldiers as they worked. They were badly frightened. Hurried glances were thrown toward the road from which they had come.

Footsteps pounded on the lower floor.

"Quick! We've got to get into the attic. They're going to set up the guns in here."

Snub Edwards followed Wallace down the long hall. At the end of it there was a small door, half the size of a man. Wallace pushed it open and saw stairs leading upward.

"Get that chair!" He pointed to a huge leather affair half way down the hall. Men were already talking on the stairs below.

Snub carried the chair to the door. Hurriedly he followed Wallace through. With it almost closed, they were still able to draw the chair close enough to hide the panel.

The attic of the chalet was low and almost pitch black. A tiny window at the front of the house sent a small shaft of sunlight across the floor. Large piles of skis and snowshoes were at the far end.

Wallace knelt carefully and peered through the small window. He watched the last Nazi enter the house. From the sounds below, he knew they had assembled a machine gun in the bedroom he and Snub had slept in. Outside,

the trucks were empty and deserted.

Ten minutes passed. Except for occasional low commands in the rooms below, there was silence. Wallace dared not move lest they hear him and start searching for the attic door.

Then they came!

Not the American patrol he had expected. Not men who fought their way forward with rifles. Wallace clutched Snub's shoulders and pointed beyond the road.

Over the pass a straight line of horsemen galloped. They were the warriors that Frederick Gothaven had seen. The men with spears pointed toward the sun. Men who wore strange robes and sandals. Fighters from the past with hard, set faces. Faces of hardened killers who fought for the love of battle.

Rank after rank they came, spears upright. There were hundreds, perhaps thousands of them sweeping down upon the chalet with red banners waving and horses kicking and plunging in the snow.

The thought of these men being mowed down under Nazi machine gun fire sickened Wallace. He wanted to cry out a warning.

Then as low commands below told Rex Wallace that the guns were about to spit death, the oncoming troops broke into a wide formation. A splendid figure of a man rose in his saddle and brought his spear down until it pointed straight at the chalet.

"Charge with your pilums!"

The roar of his voice was drowned in the hoarse, eager battle cry that followed. As in a trance, Wallace was aware that the horsemen had spread out in groups and were closing in from every side. Horses reared on their hindquarters and spears came low for the throw. The air was suddenly shattered with thunderous sound.

THE sudden breaking of the formation caught the Nazi gunners off guard. They started firing wildly, but it was like a hunter who sees many birds at once and can hit none of them.

Then the air was full of hurtling spears. Windows crashed in and still they came. He heard the shouts and curses of the men below as, one by one, the guns were silenced.

"Dismount! Charge with gladius!"

The chalet seemed to quiver under the impact of the dismounted men as they came, wave on wave, with brandished swords. The halls and stairs shivered under their feet.

One by one the rooms below were quiet once more. Only the gruff voices of the warriors filtered up through the boards. Wallace looked at Snub. The photographer's face was pale, his teeth chattering.

"I hope to God they miss that door," Snub whispered. "Rex, I still can't believe . . ."

Wallace nodded.

"Thank the Lord they were fighting Nazis *this* time," he said. "They make every man their enemy."

Men were pouring from the house now and dragging their mounts from the milling throng. Several wounded warriors had been tied across the backs of their own horses. Discarded spears and equipment was collected carefully. They went as swiftly as they had come. All the Nazis were dead before they left. The armed legion had taken no prisoners to betray them.

"Let's get out of here." Snub arose to his knees. He felt violently ill.

"Wait!" Wallace saw the two men who came galloping back. They carried strung bows and rode side by side into the yard.

The arrows in those bows were tipped with flaming cloth.

"Down stairs, quick!" Wallace

made a quick dash toward the ski pile in the corner. "The devils are going to burn the place to the ground."

Even as he spoke, twin thuds sounded on the dry shingles above. Smoke rushed downward and red flame darted into this dry attic. Arrows continued to shuttle through the air, into every part of the age-dried chalet.

CHAPTER V

Queen or Slave?

EVENTS of the past three hours had left Frances Boise filled with fear and yet with a new-born respect for her captors. Last night, when they had rushed into the kitchen and overpowered her and Papa Boise, it had been terrible. She had tried to cry out, felt a huge, hairy paw over her mouth and the cry had died in her throat. The trip through the night was cold and horrible.

Now, that the sun was shining once more, she felt better. She rode on the fur saddle in front of a tall young man with a red beard. His arm, brown and hard, had been around her waist as she slept. It remained, but during the night he had wrapped her carefully in a huge bear skin. Frightened and hungry, the girl was still excited about her adventure. What was to become of them she dared not guess but for the time being the sun was warm and Frances Boise felt safe.

Papa Boise cared only for the safety of his daughter. These, he had little doubt, were the same horsemen who had come to the chalet two nights before. Why had they kidnaped Frances and him?"

There were ten men in the group, riding single file up the steady incline of the switchback trail. Snow two feet deep had been packed down by hoofs

of many horses. Papa Boise realized that wherever they went, there were many other warriors waiting.

"Halt!"

The young man who rode with Frances gave the command in a cool, hard voice.

"Look behind you," he said, "and you will know why you are with us."

The line of horses had turned about slowly. Frances looked down the side of the mountain. Many miles away in the clear morning air the tiny roof of the chalet was visible. A tiny pin prick of black against the white snow, it nestled at the base of the first pass.

As they looked, a puff of smoke drifted up and died in the sky. Bright flames burned like tiny candles.

"The chalet!" Papa Boise's voice was filled with alarm. "It is burning . . ."

With a sob he tried to break away. It was useless. Red Beard rode close, smiling at the old man.

"Be not alarmed," he said. "Our leader cautioned us that you were to be taken to safety. It was destined that your home should be destroyed. It is on the bloody battle ground of our forefathers."

Something in his voice made Frances Boise feel better. She watched the chalet below with tears in her eyes. It had been their home, their only possession. It burned quickly and died to a black smudge against the snow. She wondered with mixed emotions what had become of the two men who had come the night before.

"*March!*" Red Beard gave the command and they resumed the endless trip up the mountain. Snow started to blow down from the steeper slopes above and white drifts began to make slow work of the ride up the trail.

THE steady *clack-clack* of the horses' hoofs against frozen ground made

Frances Boise drowsy. Hiding herself within the robe she tried to escape the stinging snow. Even now the chalet was a long distance from her mind. In youth, high adventure mends one's heart quickly.

"Hoooo!"

She sat up suddenly, startled by the faint cry that came on the howling wind.

Red Beard tensed in the saddle.

"Hoooo!" he shouted. "It is Zeratin returning from the pass."

The cry came closer.

"Approach slowly, Zeratin, that we may see."

A small band of men came down the trail on foot. They were spread fan-wise and each held a bent bow. The bowstrings went limp and arrows were returned to their quivers. A stout, ruddy-faced man came forward with outstretched arms. Zeratin, the Red Beard, lowered the girl from the saddle and dropped to his own feet. He grabbed the red-faced bowman about the waist and they embraced with heavy laughter.

"I see that you have performed your mission," the stout man said. "It is good that the innocent did not suffer."

"It is good," Zeratin answered. "Now, Rudger, what of the Pilums?"

Rudger, the guard, grinned.

"You saw the fire in the valley?"

Zeratin nodded.

"That is your answer. The legion of Pilums sent that signal that another troop of Romans has been destroyed."

"Good," Zeratin answered. "And now to the valley with our guests before they feel the sharp teeth of the blizzard."

The men were dismounting. The guards had taken the horses away toward a huge cave in the side of the hill. Try as she might, Frances Boise could make nothing of the strange ex-

pressions she heard around her.

Pilums? Romans?

Pilums were spears. It was an old Latin name. It was clear that their chalet had been burned as a signal that these men had killed a troop of Romans. Yet, there were no Italians in the valley who were fighting. She shook her head in bewilderment.

At Zeratin's side she trudged through the snow toward the opening in the cliff. They reached it and sunlight came from the other side.

Zeratin led the way through the great rock opening. They came out on an open ledge. It was warm and green in the valley below. No snow touched the place, or if it did, the warmth of the enclosed pit melted it before it could touch the ground.

With pounding heart she looked away to the far length of the valley. The men, realizing her wonderment, stood quietly as she drank in the beauty of the scene. Tiny green trees scattered on a lawn of lush green grass. Long rows of brightly striped tents spread like beach cabanas in the sun. At the far end, a legion of horsemen darted about in drill practice.

THE valley was a vast army camp, filled with men who were trained and ready at a moment's notice. Yet such an army she had never seen before. It was like a dream from the ancient Swiss history book she had studied as a girl. And to make her dream complete, a troop of ponderous, swinging beasts came up suddenly on the trail they were to descend.

Elephants! Here in the high Alps, lost between mountains of snow, the line of huge beasts passed them on the trail toward the outside world. The men on their backs were grim-faced. White robes covered their black-skinned bodies and their words

were the strange, guttural talk of African Berbers.

"Come," Zeratin ordered. "We go down now. I am sorry the woman cannot ride. Here, women are as slaves until such time as the Leader wills otherwise."

Papa Boise's eyes were grim.

"My daughter will ride," he said. "I will walk in her place."

The elephant troop had swung around in the cavern above and was returning. Zeratin, the Red Beard, never wavered. He knew what could be done here and his authority was limited though his heart was not. When he spoke to Papa Boise, his words were clipped, almost cruel.

"You are not in command. Certain rules exist that are not to be broken. The distance is short and should the girl ride into our camp her life with us would be most unpleasant. She must walk."

Papa Boise started to say something but the look in his daughter's eyes stopped him. Silently he allowed himself to be swung aloft to the platform on the elephant's broad back. The others did likewise. At a grunted command the strange beasts swayed downward toward the valley.

Silent and bewildered, Frances Boise followed on foot.

CHAPTER VI

Rudger Strings His Bow

REX WALLACE knew the chalet wouldn't last more than fifteen minutes. While Snub Edwards dashed madly down the attic stairs, he took a last look from the tiny attic window. The bowmen who had started the blaze were already riding swiftly from the yard. The room was filled with dense smoke. Choking, Wallace took a hand-

kerchief from his pocket and tied it around his face. He went toward the pile of skis quickly, scooped up an armload of them and raced down the stairs. Snub was at the lower door.

"Thought you passed out," Snub choked. "Let's get out of here."

Flames were crackling from all parts of the lodge now. Smoke rolled up from the lounge below.

"Get these skis down and out front." Wallace passed the heavy load to the smaller man. "Stand below the bedroom window. I'm going after one of those machine guns."

Without waiting for a reply he ran along the hall. The smoke was lighter here. He opened the door. Three Nazi soldiers sprawled on the floor. One had a spear through his face. The other two lay face down, bloody holes torn in their backs. The machine gun stood on its tripod by the window. They had little chance to use it. Several steel boxes of ammunition lay near the gun. With the door behind him closed there was no smoke in the room. Wallace prayed that Snub would get clear with his load.

Snatching the heavy blanket off the bed he started tearing it into long strips. In a few moments he had a long, heavy wool rope. He tied it carefully about the base of the gun, lifted it and heaved it over the window sill.

Snub dashed into the yard below.

"Hurry up," he shouted above the crackling flames. "There's a ton of ammunition in the kitchen. When the flame hits it . . ."

"Shut up and catch," Wallace shouted. "Get the gun and the skis away from the building. I'll be down."

He lowered the gun quickly and saw Snub struggling with it across the yard.

"Stand clear!"

He started tossing ammunition boxes from the window and heard them strike

the snow. No explosion resulted. Wallace climbed to the sill himself. The roof sloped downward for twenty feet to its edge. With a quick push he started to slide along the smooth shingles, saw the ground bounce up suddenly as his knees flexed and hit hard. He rolled over and over to break the fall.

Snub had already carried the last box across the yard and into the ditch. They dropped into the small gully and waited, lying close to the ground. The chalet was ablaze to the roof now. Flames licked along the dry shingles and over the logs of the kitchen.

A moment of intense silence and then the morning was torn wide open by the explosion. Logs flew into the air as powder met flame.

"Boom!"

HUGGING the ground, Wallace hoped none of the flaming wood would come their way. He relaxed suddenly, taking a cautious look back at the clearing. The chalet was gone—blown to the sky by the explosion. He stood up.

"Can't waste time," he said quickly. "No telling how many more Nazis are on their way here. That fire may draw everyone within miles."

Snub grinned. His face was black with smoke.

"You wouldn't mind telling me where we're headed for?"

Wallace, grim and unsmiling, started lacing together three pairs of the skis he had rescued from the attic.

"I don't know," he admitted. "Our horse-riding friends did a nice job of those Nazis but I'm still settling our account with them. We're going to haul our little pet into the hills and find Frances Boise and her father."

He patted the muzzle of the machine gun lovingly.

"Remember how much luck the Nazis had with those things," Snub cautioned.

Wallace was already mounting the gun on top of the row of lashed skis. He had rigged a sort of toboggan with the gun upright, ready to fire, on top of it.

"I'll take a chance," he said. "Besides, I think I know a trick or two about mountain fighting that the Nazis don't. Can you manage on skis?"

Snub shook his head.

"Sorry," he admitted. "I'll walk now and ride down later with the gun."

Wallace slipped the last pair of skis under his feet and strapped them on tightly.

"Sounds all right," he admitted. "That gives us a mobile unit ready for action on the fly."

Together they started up the slow incline behind the destroyed chalet. The hoofprints were still deep and clear where the captors of Frances Boise and her father had passed the night before.

The climb was long and the heavy snow hindered their own progress. For twelve terrible hours. Rex Wallace struggled onward up the switchback trail. Three times they had rested, but finding no relief from the long grilling pull upward, Wallace had submitted to riding on the makeshift toboggan. They took turns, first riding and then dragging each other onward toward the sky.

Nothing would be gained by an accurate account of the hardships they suffered. Suffice to say that as night darkened the snow and the moon came across the ridges of flying white particles, Rex Wallace was more exhausted than he had ever been before. The long day had blinded both men until their eyes were red, swollen slits. Their arms ached and yet Wallace wouldn't leave the gun. It was their one margin of safety in this strange world.

It may have been the howling wind that raged downward, choking the breath from their lungs. It may have been utter exhaustion that caused Rex Wallace to ignore the voice that floated down on the night wind.

"Hoo!"

Rudger, the guard, stood alone in the pass that led to the valley. The two strangers who staggered up from below, dragged behind them an object that was strange and yet sinister to his sharp eyes.

"Hoo!"

He called again, louder. As wise and relentless as was Rudger, he had no wish to bury his feathered shafts in the necks of friends. But now he was sure they were not friends. One of the men looked up at him through the night. He raised an arm and fell forward in the snow.

The other, shouting something that signified fright although the message itself was lost in the wind, threw himself on the sled behind the strange object. Suddenly fire seemed to spit through the night and the rocks behind Rudger shattered and fell away.

The tall, husky guard had no choice. Stringing his bow with sudden speed he leveled his eye across the string and let the arrow fly.

"*Twang!*"

The song of death was gentle, sighing into the wind. The man behind the fire-machine slumped forward and the fire ceased to come. A dark figure appeared near the wall behind Rudger, spoke to him.

"We heard the alarm."

Rudger dropped the bow to his side and pointed proudly at the target on the sled.

"In the shoulder, and at sixty paces," he said. "Be careful of the one in the snow. He may be playing a trick to lure you close."

CHAPTER VII

The Dagger of Alixe

ALTHOUGH Frances Boise had been in the strange valley for several hours, she knew little of the people who lived here. The elephant caravan had been greeted warmly as it wound down the long line of bright tents that seemed to make up a sort of main street to the camp. She had stood alone as warriors of every age and color dashed from their quarters and circled Zeratin.

"What tidings of the outside?"

"The Romans? Are they dying like the dogs they are?"

"The old man? Where is he from?"

Their cries filled the dusty warmth of the street and Frances stood alone on the outside of the circle. At last Zeratin seemed to have answered their questions well. The crowd faded swiftly and the elephants were led away. In the distance men were singing a war song. The sound came to her through the trees.

Zeratin and her father came toward her. Papa Boise was exhausted and his face was a mask of anger. Zeratin seemed in high good spirits. A smile crossed his face as he came close to her.

"I am sorry that you have been forced to enter our camp so humbly," he told her. "You see, there are few women here . . . none so lovely as you."

He stood before her, a frankly appraising smile on his lips.

"The others have earned their place with our army by serving us well. It is my hope that you can do likewise, winning your place among the higher caste."

Her face was suddenly flaming red.

"Then, until I win my place, as you put it, I can consider myself a slave?"

Zeratin seemed taken aback by her show of temper.

"Is that so difficult?" he asked. "Our camp is warm and safe. The living here is good. You will be treated with respect. When our Leader summons you to his tent you may consider yourself one of us. Until then . . ."

He lifted his arm, motioning someone from the shadows of a large tent nearby. A young girl came toward them, her body swathed in coarse linen, her face hidden by a long veil. She bowed low before Red Beard.

"The master wishes?"

"Take this girl to your tent," Zeratin ordered abruptly. "She, like you, awaits the Leader. See that she is properly clothed and treated well."

Before Frances could protest, Zeratin turned on his heel and was gone. Two warriors went behind him, leading Papa Boise between them. With a shrug, Frances turned to the slave girl.

"I'm ready," she said. "Lead on."

The slave girl looked at her curiously. Her black eyes, the only features visible above the veil, seemed to cut through Frances.

"You are a friend of Zeratin?"

Something about the touch of sarcasm in her voice acted as a sharp warning to Frances Boise. Her eyes narrowed slightly.

"I have no friend here," she said sharply. "I was captured by the red-haired one. He's no friend of mine."

The slave girl seemed satisfied. It was with a softer voice she said:

"I am Alixe. You will come with me, please?"

"Thank you, Alixe," the new slave girl answered. "My name is Frances."

THE slave tent was devoid of life. A single row of clean, colorful beds cut across the center of the grassy floor. The place was arranged so that colorful

curtains separated each bed. Pails of water and lines of tables seemed to take care of the dressing table problem. It was much like the dressing tent of a circus, but much larger, brighter, and warm with the warmth of the gentle valley breeze.

Under Alixe's instructions, Frances Boise removed her own coarse clothing and donned the gray, soft robe. She was told to cover her face with the same type of veil that Alixe wore.

"You are free to wander about at will during the afternoon hours," Alixe said. "We labor at the well, wash clothing in the river and do the work of the camp in the morning. We must all stay in the tents at night if we are to maintain our chances of being accepted in higher circles."

"This higher circle," Frances said cautiously. "What do you do when you get there?"

Alixe laughed lightly.

"You need not worry. Life here is not difficult. Men are not permitted to molest us. If a warrior desires you he must report to the Leader. You will then be taken before the Leader, your veil removed and you will become that warrior's wife."

"And you?" Frances Boise couldn't resist the question. "Is there a warrior who will ask for you?"

The eyes that stared at her over the veil became hard and relentless once more.

"Zeratin will ask for my hand during the coming moon," Alixe answered. "And I want it to be thus. Please remember that."

In spite of herself, Frances felt a quick blush warm her cheeks. She was thankful for the veil that hid it.

"I have no intentions of seeking your Zeratin," she said coldly. "So far as I'm concerned you can have him quite to yourself."

"It is well!" From under the folds of her dress, Alixe whipped a tiny, jeweled dagger. She displayed it in the palm of her hand for an instant and returned it to its hiding place. "That will remind you of your promise!"

"Hooo! *We have brought Romans!*"

"Romans!" the cry went up outside the slave tent. "Rudger has brought us Romans."

The place was alive with shouted commands and footsteps pounding on the green alleys between the tents. Following Alixe, Frances Boise went quickly from the tent. She stood at the entrance as the line of elephants swung down the turf before her. Warriors had leaped from every tent and were marching behind the caravan. Rudger led the party.

It was on the broad back of one of the elephants that Frances saw something to make her heart cold. In a large, covered howdah, two men were seated. If Rex Wallace could see at all, he was too weak to realize that she was there. He leaned back in the box, his eyes almost closed, breathing heavily through parched lips. Snub Wallace sat beside him, his head tipped back. A white bandage covered one shoulder. On the elephant that followed, she recognized some of her father's skis. A machine gun, badly battered, was tossed in a jumbled heap beside the skis.

"To the cells!" The voices took up the shout until her ears were ringing. "To the prison, and when they have strength, toss them into the arena to prove they are cowardly Romans."

Frances turned slowly to the girl behind her. She tried to hide the confusion and fear in her heart.

"What—what will they do with those men?"

Alixe drew her head high.

"They are Romans," she said stiffly. "They will decide their own fate. A

Roman is too cowardly to fight."

Then, Frances Boise thought hopelessly, all men outside the valley were called Romans. One point alone kept her from running toward the passing men. She would betray herself before these hordes. She had certain faith in the tall man with the flat nose. She was sure, even after an evening with him at the chalet, that if Romans were cowards, he could prove himself as brave as any man in this valley.

"Can we go about the camp now?" she asked Alixe quietly. "I would like to see everything."

"We shall see everything." Alixe passed her fingers lightly over her waist where the jeweled dagger was hidden. "But be sure that you see Zeratin only from a distance."

CHAPTER VIII

"You Will Fight and Die!"

REX WALLACE awakened suddenly, felt himself jolted from side to side and looked about in amazement. It seemed minutes ago that he had stood knee deep in the snow trying wildly to prevent that giant with the bow from shooting him down. The strain of the long mountain climb had been too much. He had fallen face down in the snow. After that he remembered nothing.

"Riding on the back of an elephant!"

The utter horror in Snub Edwards' voice brought Wallace around hurriedly. Then the bouncing and swaying were not in his imagination. Snub was at his side, wide eyed, a bandage around one shoulder.

Snub sat on the wooden seat, staring first at Wallace and then over the rim of the rude, high howdah and down at the throng of men who followed them.

"Elephants?"

"Yeah, I know," Snub said. "It kinda got me for a minute, too. That big guy on the mountain beat me to the draw. He shot a stick of wood into my shoulder and then, just as nice as you please, took it out again and patched me up."

"But the elephants—this valley—it's like summer," Wallace tried to move, and realized that his hands and feet were tightly bound.

"Me, too," Snub went on. "It's all a part of a beautiful movie set. They shoot you and then they rub out the frostbite, tie you up and ride you around through Heaven on a circus elephant. It don't make sense."

Wallace wasn't sure. Perhaps it *did* make sense after all. He stared about in wonder. The procession of elephants was marching between long rows of tents. It was evident they were in a protected, grass-covered valley. The warriors had to come from somewhere. Perhaps, after all, he was lucky to have found them so soon.

The column stopped suddenly. From ahead, a huge figure of a man walked along the line of animals with a long pole in his hands with which he touched the beasts on their snouts. One by one they awkwardly knelt.

Wallace braced his feet against the front of the box as the animal they were on knelt in the dust. Rough hands reached over the railing and they were dragged out. Wallace was conscious of angry faces about him. He tried to stand up and was promptly tripped by his ropes, sprawling face down in the dust.

"Hail the Roman heroes."

The voice of the giant Rudger boomed out and laughter greeted his words. The prisoners were dragged roughly across an open court and into a small, stone building and down long, stone stairs. Wallace tried to stay on

his feet. Warriors pushed him headlong into a tiny cell. Snub, following him, fell heavily to the musty floor and rolled over.

"Nice greeting for heroes," he moaned. "If I ever get another chance with that gun . . ."

Wallace lay still until ponderous footsteps told him the others were leaving the building. Then he rolled to the wall and worked his way to his feet.

"Nice layout," he grunted. "No windows, no opening other than the door. I wonder what's next?"

THEY didn't have long to wait. The door swung open suddenly. A tall, heavy-set young man came in. He had come down the stairs silently. His face was covered with fierce red stubble and his hair was rusty red.

"My name is Zeratin," he announced calmly. "I am in charge here."

Rex Wallace grinned sourly.

"Take these damned ropes off and let's shake hands," he offered. "We're really not dangerous."

Zeratin crossed the cell in a stride and removed the thongs from Wallace's wrists.

"That remains to be seen," he said. "But, for the time being, you are helpless. We do not usually act so kindly toward Romans."

Wallace was already busy with Snub's bonds. At the mention of Romans he stood up quickly, a puzzled frown on his face.

"Romans? I don't get it. There's something wrong here. I'm an American. So is my friend."

For a moment Zeratin looked puzzled. Then he smiled.

"Your imagination is good, my friend. Fortunately you have chosen a race that does not exist. If you had said Teutonic, I might have believed."

He turned as though to leave, hesi-

tated, then turned.

"However," he said, a gleam of humor in his eyes. "You will have a chance to prove your bravery."

"Am I supposed to ask how?" Wallace was more and more angered by the complete smugness of the man. "All right, how are we to prove how brave we are?"

Zeratin, in spite of himself, had become interested in this pair. They did not look or act like the cowardly men his legions had mowed down. He rather liked the tall one. He wasn't handsome, but the strong body, the flattened, grim face marked his prisoner apart from the others.

"I don't know why I say this," he answered slowly. "Unless . . . perhaps there *is* a chance that you are not of the Roman band. Our Leader will watch you this afternoon in the arena. There, two doors will be open for your escape. A lion guards either door. If a keen blade can save you from death, you will have that chance. Otherwise, you must die!"

CHAPTER IX

The Hatred of Alixe

FRANCES BOISE was desperate. More and more, after she saw Rex Wallace and his friend dragged from their elephant and thrown into prison, did she realize that something must be done to help them. What, she had no idea. She was alone, knowing only what the slave girl, Alixe, told her. And she could not trust Alixe.

It was from Alixe that she learned what the two men were to face. The Leader, that mysterious person whom Alixe spoke of only in hushed tones, had prepared a fitting end for any man who came here unwanted.

There lurked in the slave girl's mind

a satanic pleasure in telling of torture and pain. She carefully went over the destiny already mapped out for Rex Wallace and Snub Edwards.

"Zeratin," Alixe said proudly, "is in charge of all prisoners. It is his duty to name the time they shall enter the arena. Lions are sent against them. No Roman has ever left alive. The Leader himself is always there to spare a brave man if he appears."

"But—but lions?" Frances tried to hide the fear in her voice. "Surely no man can fight such a beast and live."

Alixé nodded indifferently.

"You have guessed it," she agreed. "The lion always wins."

They went about the camp, keeping out of the way of warriors whose horses galloped about the green turf. Tents and more tents. The arena, a stone structure open to the sky, stood at the far end of the valley.

"I would like to see the arena," Frances said timidly. "Would it be possible for us to go in?"

Evidently Alixe was proud of her freedom about the camp.

"What silly whim is behind your request, I can't imagine." Her head straightened proudly. "But Zeratin will have no objection if *I* take you there. Come. . . ."

Together they entered the narrow doors and walked about the platform at the edge of the open enclosure.

"The Leader sits here." Alixe pointed to a raised section on the main balcony. "Through that door, and the other, the lion is released."

"Then there are only two of the beasts?"

"Only one," Alixe corrected. "No matter which door is opened, it is the same cage. The lion comes through either."

Then, seeing the puzzled expression on her companion's face, she went on.

"It's a touch that Zeratin has added. The men are told that one door leads to safety and the other to death. It's laughable to see the expression on the fool's face when, after long deliberation, he opens the wrong door in either case."

Frances shivered.

"Let's go back," she urged. "I—I've seen enough."

As they descended the steps to the grass once more, she tried to think of some way to help the two men who faced this horrible death. *Zeratin!* He was the only one who could help her. She glanced at her companion. In some ways Alixe was lovely. She swung along gracefully, head high, eyes sharp and deeply black. The girl seemed of Greek descent but her age Frances could not guess. She remembered the wicked little dagger in the girl's belt.

She must see Zeratin at all costs. Alixe could be reckoned with later if that were necessary.

THE opportunity came sooner than she had hoped. Zeratin had not forgotten the lovely stranger who had rode with him through the long night. Many times during that ride, he had longed to press his lips against the lips of the sleeping girl. The restraint of a young nobleman had held him in check.

Now that the moon was high and the winds of the valley soft and warm in the silvery light, he sought out the tent of slaves. Frances was fortunate. Only a short time before, Alixe had left in a flare of temper, looking for the red-bearded warrior.

Frances Boise stood alone, worried and ill at ease. She leaned lightly against one of the ropes that supported the tent and gazed out toward the lip of the valley—and home.

"Does the lovely maiden long for her home?"

The words came from behind her,

strong and vibrant with interest. She wheeled about with a little gasp, and recognized the man whom she had been hoping to see.

"It's Red Beard," she said. "Then you *are* sorry that I had to walk into the valley behind the elephants."

He stood a short distance from her, ill at ease with a woman who spoke so sincerely.

"More sorry than I can express," he admitted. "Unfortunately, it is the custom here. I had no choice."

Her lips tightened and above the veil that hid her face he saw her deep eyes flash angrily.

"It is also your custom to torture innocent men?"

For a moment he was taken aback by the sudden flare of temper. Then he sat down on the grass, and stared up at her.

"That again is a task I do not enjoy," he admitted. "The Leader has placed it within my duties. I suppose you know those men who came here today?"

She was suddenly cautious now.

"No more than other men." She sat down before him, arranging her skirt carefully. "They came to our chalet for the night. But, Zeratin, they mean no harm. They are not your enemies."

In spite of herself, a sob escaped her lips. This was her plea. If it went ignored, there was no appeal she could make to save the Americans from certain death.

Zeratin sprang to his feet. He was suddenly the tall, brutal warrior she had seen earlier that day.

"All men are our enemies." He spoke mechanically, as though he recited a vow. "We are in the country of the Romans and not even their spies, men or women, will sway our decisions."

The girl arose and stood before him. Her shoulders shook under the robe and

tears were in her eyes. Still, the voice that whipped from under the veil was strong and defiant.

"Then if you are barbarians, kill. Go and kill every decent man in the mountains. The Romans, as you call them, are done fighting. They have been whipped to the last man. It's that beast Hitler we're after now. Go on—murder the men who carry on the fight for decency. Every one of them dead will make the world unsafe another day. Tell your Leader that!"

ZERATIN, the Red Beard, had never heard such words from a woman. Now, with this little slave facing him with clenched fists and tear-filled eyes, he knew no answer to her challenge.

These were strange words. A fool she must be to say the Romans were no longer fighting. The Leader must hear her words, must talk with the girl. Yes, and the Leader must also hear of the doubts that had arisen in his own mind during the past hours.

Zeratin was troubled that he could make no answer. Suddenly he turned on his heel and strode away. There was nothing about the broad back, the flashing helmet to betray his newborn doubts.

Frances Boise knew after Zeratin had left her that she would never get his support in freeing the Americans. She arose quietly and went down the line of tents toward the arena. If she could hide somewhere in the structure, perhaps she could be of some help in the morning.

Then she remembered the machine gun.

It had been tossed into the howdah on the elephant that walked behind the prisoners. She stopped in the shadow of the tents. If she were found here, away from the tent at night she would

be punished. Yet she knew that other girls disobeyed the ruling and that even now Alixe might be somewhere in the camp with Zeratin. She'd have to take the chance.

A swift search located the stable tents at the far end of the small valley. A lighted lantern flickered through an open tent flap and inside she saw a row of huge beasts bedded for the night in deep hay. One man, an old warrior with his head tipped to one side in sleep, guarded the interior of the tent.

Outside, a row of howdahs were lined against the canvas. She went among them eagerly, looking hopefully into each. In the last one something dark and shining caught her eye. It was the gun. She knew little of such objects but from her knowledge of the German equipment she was sure the gun was intact.

The complete weapon was more than she could manage at one time. During the next half hour Frances Boise made three swift, torturous trips to the stone arena on the hill. At first she tried to drag the entire gun up the grass slopes. Finally, taking the barrel, the tripod and the ammunition boxes separately she managed to get them inside the dark entrance of the fort-like enclosure without being detected.

The arena was pitch black and deserted. Stumbling about in the lower tunnels, she tried hard to remember the location of the doors through which the lion would come. It was useless. The maze of underground passages seemed to lead nowhere. Finally she blundered through a small panel and found herself in the open arena. The sight of the stone seats rising deserted and cold startled her.

HURRIEDLY she dragged the parts of the gun down the long stairs. The layout of the lion cage was

simple. There were three doors to it. One through which the beast could enter. The other two, one at each end, led directly to each door of the arena floor.

Hurriedly she lowered the bars at one end of the cage and put the gun together as she had found it. The ammunition boxes were hopeless belts that twisted in her bruised hands. She left them at last, hoping that the Americans could adjust them.

Leaving the cage, she started toward the opposite end and the other door to the arena. With the cage bared from each end, the Americans would be able to find the gun before . . .

Frances Boise stopped short, her heart pounding wildly.

Voices drifted down to her from above. There were footsteps on the steps.

She shrank back into the shadows, her eyes, wide and frightened, riveted to the still open end of the lion cage.

"But I tell you sometimes I wonder if the Leader is right . . ."

It was Zeratin. His voice was low and puzzled. Frances darted up the steps, saw a tiny lamp flicker above her and slipped back into the darkness. Zeratin and Alixe were coming down, arm in arm. The slave girl's eyes were on Red Beard.

"You must not question him." She had evidently been pleading with Zeratin for some time. "He is *always* right."

They passed her there in the darkness, and she held her breath until they had gone around the corner and toward the cage.

If they discovered the gun—the partly closed cage . . .

But the couple below were already returning. Trying to fight off the fear that held her here, alone in the dark, Frances Boise waited until they were close to the turn in the hall. Then she

turned and ran silently up the steps. The Americans had but one chance for escape. If she were caught here now her plan would be discovered and they would die without an opportunity to defend themselves.

Trembling, she stopped a safe distance from the arena and looked back. The lamp-light appeared at the entrance, flickered and went out. She hurried toward the slave tent and crept in silently. Once under the silken covers of her bed, she buried her head in the pillows and sobbed as though her heart would break. Every muscle in her slim body quivered with the strain it had undergone.

Alixé entered sometime later. She paused at the bed where Frances Boise lay quietly. A smile of satisfaction touched her lips and her hand crept to the small dagger in her belt.

"You are safe, foolish slave girl," she whispered softly, "so long as Zeratin continues to smile at me . . ."

The dagger was in her hands, and she stroked the razor edge of it with a soft finger.

"But if he smiles at you again . . ."

CHAPTER X

Arena of Death

REX WALLACE entered the arena with a grim desire to die the hard way. He had no thought of escaping from these wild men. They were too strong for him to fight, but he meant to prove that he was not afraid. Ten mounted men had come to the stone prison when the sun was high.

"Here goes nothin'," Snub said as they were led into the open. "I'd like to have pictures of me fighting a lion."

The stout-hearted photographer didn't fool Wallace. They were both thinking the same thing. A man alone

with a lion. Even the two of them had no chance.

The arena was filled with warriors. Zeratin himself escorted Wallace to the wall and pointed to the sand-covered pit.

"There are two doors," he shouted above the boisterous mob. "You are to open the one you wish. From one the beast will emerge. If you open the other, you are free men."

"Perhaps you don't remember the speech you gave us last night," Wallace said grimly. "About the same lion coming from either door?"

Zeratin grinned approvingly.

"This is the first time I have pushed a fighter into the arena," he answered. "Perhaps it was to give you a chance that I told you."

Snub Edwards stood at Wallace's side. He was trying very hard to swallow his adam's-apple.

"Do we fight with our bare hands?" he demanded.

Zeratin turned to the warrior behind him.

"Gladius!" he commanded.

The man whipped a short sword from his belt and reached for another from a second warrior. The swords were passed to Wallace and Edwards.

"You are armed," Zeratin said shortly. "Will you jump or be pushed?"

Wallace took one look at the sand-covered pit below, placed a firm hand on the rail and swung over it. From the circle of faces around him a roar of approval went up. Snub caught his breath and followed. They rolled over in the sand from the ten foot drop and stood up.

For the first time Wallace had a good look at the men who had come to see him die. There were perhaps two thousand men in the seats. Evidently this was a choice bit of action

that only the elite were allowed to witness.

At the far end of the arena, a high rostrum stood apart from the rest. A throne-like chair was upon it. Colorful cloth covered this chair and striped canvas was spread above it. A man sat there, stiff and proud, his plumes of feathers waving in the breeze.

This then was the Leader. To Wallace he looked young. Hardly over twenty-five. In the shimmering sun Wallace fancied he could detect stubble on the man's face, a set smile on his lips. With a sarcastic grin Wallace bowed low and laid the sword on the sand, pointing toward the chair. Evidently he was doing the correct thing to impress these heathens, for a loud roar of approval cut the air once more and Snub followed Wallace's example.

There was no more time for stalling. Wallace studied Snub's grim face approvingly.

"Ready for the fireworks?" He tried to sound confident.

"As ready as I'll ever be." Snub said. "Open one of those doors and get ready to run."

WALLACE approached one of the doors warily. There was nothing to distinguish it from the other. Round, iron rings hung from them both.

"Here's to the lady or the tiger," he murmured and yanked one of them open. He jumped to one side and waited with sword raised. For a moment nothing happened. Then, in the darkness beyond the door, a deep-throated roar blasted the silence of the arena. The audience was quiet, waiting eagerly.

Wallace swallowed the dust that choked his throat. His eyes gradually pierced the gloom of the narrow passage. Then he saw, not the lion, but the heavy machine gun that he had

dragged over the hills from the chalet. How it came here he did not question. Here was safety, not only from the lion but a means of escape from the strange warriors of Zeratin. He turned to Snub.

"Put on a show," he whispered. "Stall for time. I'm arranging this show so *we* can play the music."

Snub had seen the gun. He needed no prompting. Before the crowd could question the silence, they had both approached the silent doorway as though ten lions were about to leap from it. Wallace went inside slowly and the lion roared again, louder than before.

A sigh went up outside. The spectators evidently thought that he had died before he could put on a show. Snub dashed out of the door wildly, ran across the arena, slipped and slid on his face through the sand. This was a new development. As he arose slowly, brushing the sand carefully from his clothes, the crowd of toughened warriors roared with delight.

Apparently Snub was wild with fear. He ran back toward the door, pointed wildly to where Wallace had disappeared, and covered his eyes with his arm.

This was rare comedy indeed. The audience laughed in appreciation as Snub capered about the arena, as though trying to gain courage to dash after his lost companion. Then as he seemed about to run into the door with his sword pointing ahead of him, he would grow frightened and dash back across the thick sand. Each time he fell in a different position, scraping skin from his face to please the mob.

Wallace worked feverishly at the machine gun. From the sound, he knew that Snub was holding their attention. The beast in the cage behind him was stalking back and forth, its mouth opening each time it came near Wallace.

"*Snub!*"

The bruised clown appeared at the door at once, motioning in at Wallace, a set grin on his face.

"Open the other door and run."

Wallace pushed the weapon close to the entrance into the arena.

"The one with the lion?" Snub was wide eyed with fright.

"Open it," Wallace said evenly. "And get in here out of the way."

The audience felt the lull. They grew impatient. They wondered why the lion had not deserted the first body and dashed toward the living man. A few men stood up as Snub went toward the unopened door. He yanked the loop of steel, then turned and dashed back to join Wallace.

A shout of surprise went up around the walls. The lion strolled slowly into the sun, blinking against the light. A roar shook the arena, drowning out the shout of wonder from the stands. The beast turned, saw the two men in the dark passage and sprang through the air with his great red mouth open.

"*Rat-tat-tat-tat.*"

Wallace tipped the trigger back gently, saving his ammunition.

The lion seemed to hesitate in mid-air. Its body lashed with pain as it sank to the blood-reddened sand. The smooth, sun-glinting hide rippled with agony and the animal was silent.

NOT so the audience. They could not understand what had happened but they had seen enough. Warriors vaulted the railing into the arena. They swept across the sand toward the men with the gun, shouting battle cries as they came.

"Steady," Wallace said. "Keep the belts clear. We'll have to work fast." The first warrior was very near to them, his spear poised.

"*Rat-tat-tat!*"

The man went down in a heap. The

others stopped and backed away.

"Charge!" It was the voice of Zeratin, thundering over the walls. "They are but two. We are many."

The Red Beard dashed through the throng of hesitating men, his short sword drawn. Wallace tightened his grip on the trigger.

"Hold!"

The command was clear, decisive. Wallace saw the men halt as though turned to stone.

The man on the high rostrum had risen to his feet. He was hardly more than a boy. His tall, slim figure stood out like that of a god.

"Come forward, prisoners. I would talk with you."

Snub looked at Wallace, distrustfully.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Rex," he whispered. "It's a trick to get us away from the gun."

Wallace's eyes never wavered from the figure of the Leader.

"I don't think so," he answered slowly. "They'll get us as soon as our ammunition is gone, anyway. We'll take the chance. You cover me when I go out."

He stood up painfully, brushed the dirt from his ragged clothes and walked into the sunlight. Crossing the arena he stood with bared head, looking up at the man on the rostrum.

"You wanted to talk with me?"

The young man smiled down upon him. He turned to the warriors.

"Bring the man here where I can talk with him," he said. "I would not look down upon one who has given so fine an account of himself in the Arena of Death."

CHAPTER XI

The Dagger Strikes Home

TO FRANCES BOISE, hidden in the underbrush close to the arena, the

sudden sharp, staccato burst of the machine gun was a wonderful sound. She had crouched close to the ground, listening to the sounds that came from inside the high walls. With mixed emotions she waited for the Americans to signal in some manner that they planned to escape. The gun spoke twice and then no more. For long minutes she waited, hoping that they would in some way get out of the stone enclosure. That she would be able to help them.

No one left the arena. It was silent now and she knew in her heart that they were dead. Trying to keep back her tears, she made her way along the wide avenue of tents and into the slave quarters.

As she was about to sink down onto the bed, a bright flash of color caught her eye from the road to the arena. From the tent flap she watched the horseman come down toward the tent city. As he came close she saw the thatch of red hair, the red beard. It was Zeratin.

Forgetting Alixe's warning, she dashed outside and stood in his path as he galloped toward her on his big charger. Zeratin reined his horse quickly and the brute reared to a sudden halt.

"You should be more careful." He slipped to the ground. His eyes were bright and excited. "I might have run you down."

"The Americans," she stammered. "The men in the arena. They are dead?"

Zeratin smiled and placed both his hands on her slender shoulders.

"No need to worry, now," he said gently. "Your men are safe."

"But—but I don't understand. I heard the gun. I thought . . ."

A questioning smile crossed his face. He held her firmly, looking straight into her eyes.

"You know how the weapon got

where it was?"

She tried to hide her eyes from his but her blush betrayed her true emotions.

"You have no cause to fear," he went on. "A miracle has happened. Our Leader has been so impressed that he has spared their lives. I interested him in the story you told me. He asks that they appear in his tent within the hour. He is anxious to hear their full story."

Relief flooded through the girl and suddenly she wanted to cry. Before she could prevent it, Zeratin held her close, her head against his shoulder.

"You are the bravest girl I have ever known," he said simply. "I hope soon to ask you . . ."

He broke away quickly.

"But now I must be away. The Leader has asked that certain preparations be made."

Before she could stop him, Zeratin was once more on his horse and riding like the wind toward the head of the valley. The Americans were safe, then. More than that, her heart was beating wildly with Zeratin's words. There was a queer new warmth in Frances Boise's heart as she went toward the slave tent with firm, defiant steps.

Could she have seen the wild eyes of Alixe, watching her from behind the light wall of the tent, she would have hesitated. Alixe had stood close to the wall as Zeratin held the girl in his arms.

She put her small hand under the robe and slim fingers closed about the handle of the jeweled dagger. Frances Boise pushed the ten-flap aside and came in. The slave girl faced her across the width of turf. Alixe's eyes were swollen and red. Her lips were straight and the blood had drained from them.

"Fool! You have forgotten my warning?"

Frances stopped short, her eyes on

the hidden hand beneath the robe.

"I—I'm sorry, Alixe. I had nothing to do with what happened."

Alixé came toward her slowly. Her eyes were pin points of wrath.

"You lifted your lips for his kisses," she hissed. "Zeratin is mine, do you understand? He is mine!"

She sprang like an agile cat, one hand seeking Frances's throat.

FRANCES BOISE fought back. Frantically, she sought to twist away from those clutching fingers, her lungs straining for breath. Instinctively, she brought her knee sharply up, felt it drive hard into the slave-girl's body.

Alixé gasped aloud under the agonizing impact, and staggered back, her savage grip broken. Before Frances could follow up her momentary advantage, however, the crazed girl had regained her balance and was rushing forward, the slender knife poised to strike.

"Swish."

A thick cudgel of wood twisted end over end through the air. A sickening thud sounded in the tent and Alixe dropped to her knees, both hands pressed to her head. Blood dripped from a wound in her temple as she withdrew her hands, staring at her reddened fingers with bewildered eyes. Then she slumped forward and was still.

Papa Boise gathered his daughter into his arms. "Are you all right, dear? Did she hurt you?"

Frances put her face against his shoulder and burst into tears. "She meant to kill me, Papa," she sobbed. "If you hadn't stopped her, she would have, too."

A sound outside the tent caused them to stiffen with alarm. The cloth flap was drawn back and Zeratin stood alone in the entrance. He looked questioningly at the old man and the girl. Then he saw Alixe, lying still on the

grass. He came in, dropped to one knee beside her and placed a hand over her heart. At last he looked up and his eyes were cold and hard.

"She is dead," he said without emotion. "You have slain her."

Frances watched him for some sign. Some token of devotion that she felt sure was there behind those expressionless eyes. He returned the stare without saying more. With bowed head she followed Papa Boise from the tent. The old man held her hand tightly in his, like a child going to receive his just reward.

CHAPTER XII

Truce with the Past

THE court of the Leader was magnificent yet simple. A huge tent was pitched on the slope close to the arena. It rose above the remainder of the camp, bright awnings of gold and blue leading from it to the arena itself.

Wallace and Snub Edwards stood, ragged and dirty, before the central throne. The Leader looked down upon them with kindly eyes. He sat apart from the remainder of the chiefs who were grouped around the raised throne of wood and gold cloth.

For the first time, as he stood alone with Snub, Wallace had his chance to appraise the Leader. He was slim and brown, a light beard covering his smooth face. He sat with a hand on one knee, his very appearance commanding respect and silence from the men about him. His dress was simple. A metal helmet covered his head and a sharp, knife-like blade protruded from its top. He wore sandals and his waist-length tunic covered with squares of bright metal was half hidden beneath a flashing red robe.

His voice was that of one who has

fought hard and successfully on many fields.

"Come nearer," he said, motioning them forward. "Sit here beside me. I want to talk with you."

Wallace advanced slowly and sat down. His body was sore and tired from the punishment it had taken.

"I would know your names," the Leader said in a friendly tone. "I was interested in what Zeratin, my second in command had to say of you."

"My name is Rex Wallace of the Chicago *Blade*. This is Snub Edwards, my photographer. We're in the Alps to cover the entrance of the Allied Armies into Germany."

The Leader looked puzzled. He turned to his men.

"Have any of you heard reports of armies with such names?"

Silence was his only answer. Heads shook slowly in negation. The Leader resumed his steady gaze.

"Zeratin tells me of strange things told to him by the new slave girl," he continued. "I ask that you give me information of your land. It may help me to understand something that has long puzzled me."

"The war," Wallace began, "is about over—or so we believe. The Italians are beaten. Hitler has withdrawn into the Alps. We had some hope of entering Germany before fall . . ."

The Leader held up a bewildered hand.

"Italians? Germans? These are strange names to us."

Wallace felt his jaw drop, got control of himself and started over.

"America, England, Russia and smaller nations are at war with the Axis. Is it possible that you know nothing of this?"

The Leader nodded.

"We know only of our own war with the Romans," he admitted. "It was

for the purpose of exterminating them from the face of the earth that I, Hannibal, have come once more to the Alps."

WALLACE was staggered by the name. He glanced quickly at Snub. The warriors about them looked on silently.

"But you speak English . . ." faltered the reporter.

The Carthaginian smiled. "To us, all languages, all tongues, are as one. The reason that this is so goes back to the same source that has brought us back to imperial Rome after so many centuries. Does that sound so strange to you?"

"Not strange," Wallace admitted slowly. "No. Not when I think of it. It's—it's the only answer."

Hannibal nodded.

"It has been told," he said, "that I took my own life after the fall of Carthage. That I swallowed a vial of stuff in the eastern court of the King of Persia. That I say, is true. It was also written that I would once more return to the fields of Rome and fight again when the tread of elephants sounded once more in the pass of the Little St. Bernard."

Wallace realized that, through some quirk of the gods, Hannibal, leader of the Carthaginians and the enemy of ancient Rome, had returned. But there were no elephants in the Alps. That was fantastic.

Like a sudden light, the truth dawned upon him.

Nazi troops had been pushing through the St. Bernard Pass for weeks. Heavy equipment might cause the vibrations responsible for Hannibal's return.

Tanks! Yes, that was it! The heavy treads of tanks on the steep trails of the pass had brought back an army that

had died fighting a cause older than Christianity. Hannibal had died, according to history, hundreds of years before Christ was born.

He faced the warrior with sudden relief, hoping against hope that he might plead his cause.

"I am going to talk to you for a time," he said awkwardly. "I have some things to say that will sound as wildly impossible as what you have just said seems to me. I would rather we talk alone. When I have finished you may tell your men what you wish. I will promise to tell you only the truth."

Hannibal of Carthage hesitated. Perhaps the honest, fearless eyes, the friendly face of the man before him convinced this warrior from the past that Wallace was sincere. With a motion of his arm he sent the men from the tent. When the last of them was gone, Wallace leaned forward.

"It was not the rumble of elephants that awakened you once more," he said. "It was the retreating tanks of an outlaw nation who are throwing our people into slavery."

Together, three men, one of them older than age itself, sat on the steps leading to the throne. Wallace started at the beginning, tracing what had happened since Roman ships destroyed the galleys of the Carthaginians and burned the city of Carthage to the ground. He traced history up to the time of Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo. He gave Hannibal a quick summary of where the Allied troops stood in relation to the mad dictators of Europe.

"My leaders," he concluded, "have heard of your fighting among the hills. We have seen you kill men of both nations and it made us wonder what you were actually fighting for. I was sent here to find you and ask for your aid."

Hannibal of Carthage did not reply

immediately. He sat silently for some time, head bent, eyes closed. Wallace watched, wondering if the man would believe—if he could grasp the truth. At last the Leader looked up. Grim purpose shone in his eyes.

"You say that the roots of Rome have been destroyed. That the sons of Roman politicians no longer fight against Carthage?"

"Carthage," Wallave explained gently, "has become Tunis. It is in the hands of the Allies."

"Then," Hannibal said quietly, "tell me your plans. I will call my warriors at once and we will be ready to march in a fortnight. The legions of Carthage will march on the side of the oppressed. Such men as you tell me of will die at the points of gladius and pilum."

THERE came the sound of sudden shouts from outside. Hannibal waited quietly as the sounds of excitement came closer. The tent flap opened quickly.

Wallace jumped to his feet as three warriors entered. They were dragging Frances Boise and her father into the tent. The old man was stolid and defiant. The girl looked up at them with tears in her eyes. Her face was streaked with dust. Zeratin, the Red Beard, stood behind them, his face an inscrutable mask.

"These two have killed the slave girl Alixe," he said. "I have brought them before you as is the custom."

While Rex Wallace stood stiff and alert, Hannibal walked slowly down to where the couple lay stretched on the ground. Neither made an attempt to arise. Hannibal stood quietly in deliberation, arms folded.

"There is no choice," he said finally. "You will arrange for the execution of them both with the coming of the next sun."

CHAPTER XIII

Zeratin Saves Face

THERE was no doubt in Rex Wallace's mind that his mission had been successful. In his head he carried a full, detailed plan of the coming attack in the passes of the Alps. The three great tunnels in the Swiss Alps, Lotschberg, St. Gotthard and Simplon had been destroyed weeks before. This left only the high passes open into enemy country. The St. Bernard pass into France was also blocked by Nazis. It was to be Hannibal's task to open all the passes through the snow bound country and break a way for the Allies and their heavy equipment. Hannibal's army consisted of 40,000 men. Divided into legions of 4,500 men, he could plan his assault in many directions, strike terror into the already frightened Nazis and the Allies would be on their way to victory. Knowing the fear which Hannibal's rare attacks had already stirred up, Wallace was confident of the outcome.

The girl and Papa Boise were condemned to die at dawn. At dawn, also, he and Snub Wallace would start the speedy trek down the steep mountains, pick up a car if one were available at Turin and go directly to General Lathers at Milan.

Wallace slept fitfully. The camp was silent and yet a new note of purpose had been in the air before sundown. Men had hurried about, while others sat in their tents mending weapons and preparing for the coming attack. They had looked at Wallace for the first time with comradeship in their rugged faces.

He thought of Frances and the old man, confined in the stone prison. The thought of letting them die was unbearable to him. He knew now that

Frances had taken the gun to the arena, thus saving his life and getting him an interview with Hannibal.

Yet, to free them was impossible. The prison was strong and well guarded. For Wallace to interfere would turn Hannibal against him and ruin the Allies' chance to enter Germany this year. Perhaps the lives of a million women and children hinged on the pair in the prison.

Unable to face the thought of the coming dawn, Wallace tried to catch some sleep as the sky grew light in the east. He was awakened by Zeratin.

"It is time for you to go. I am to accompany you past the outer guards."

The warrior looked haggard and worn. He also, Wallace decided, had had a bad night.

WALLACE arose, awakened Snub and they dressed hurriedly. Zeratin stood close by as they donned heavy coats and went to the elephants waiting in the dawn mists outside the tent. Once on the backs of the beasts, they went swiftly toward the high, cave-like exit to the valley. The elephants covered the ground with rapid, shuffling strides.

Zeratin was silent until they reached the guard, Ruder. Then, as Wallace pushed his feet into the leather straps of his skis, Zeratin said:

"You need not worry about the girl and her father. It was my duty to see that they were punished. Theirs was a crime we cannot permit unless . . ."

He hesitated, his face turning a warm red.

" . . . unless some warrior will take the person who committed the crime and be responsible for his further actions."

"You have taken the girl as your slave?" Wallace asked quietly.

"I have taken her as my wife." Zeratin turned on his heel and strode hastily back toward the valley.

Snub had already settled himself comfortably on the toboggan-like arrangement of skis.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said softly. "So that's how he got around the rules! Come on, Rex, pick up that rope and get moving. We've got a long way to go."

Rex Wallace was grinning happily as he took the rope that was attached to Snub's makeshift sled and started in long, easy strides down the steep, snow-clad mountain. The skis gained momentum and in a few minutes he was following the trail skillfully, trying hard to keep Snub Edwards from pitching off the sled that slipped along wildly behind him.

CHAPTER XIV

Betrayal?

GENERAL JOHN L. LATHERS was as cool and business-like as he had been when Wallace left on his search for the lost legions. The offices he had occupied were bombed by the Nazi night patrol and Lathers was living in another building halfway down the street. He greeted Wallace with the usual hearty hand clasp and sat down to listen.

"Incredible," he muttered, after the story was told. "Yet, you're not a man to take fairy tales too much to heart, Wallace. If you say it is really Hannibal, we'll take your word. I'll start the wheels turning tonight. Nazi troops have been coming in pretty close to the valley. I'd like to keep our plans under cover as long as possible."

Wallace stood up, stretched comfortably and lighted a cigarette.

"Good," he agreed. "There'll be

plenty of excitement once it starts. Right now, I need a bed."

He awakened several times during the night to the sound of hurried preparations within the town. Heavy trucks, snowplows, and artillery roared through the streets toward the north. Toward one o'clock a hurried knock sounded on the door. A sleepy-eyed messenger was outside.

"Beg pardon, sir," he removed his cap. "General Lathers' compliments, and will you see him at once."

"Somethin' wrong?" Snub asked from the other bed.

Wallace said, "We're due at Lathers' office at once. Somethin's up."

They saw at once that Lathers was deeply concerned about something.

"I haven't said anything to my men," he said when they entered his office. "Didn't want them to know we were following a ghost army through the Alps. They have simply been told to move through the numerous canyons at my general order."

Wallace nodded.

"Well," Lathers went on, "A patrol reported in at a small village near the burned chalet tonight about ten. They said they had seen an army, carrying torches, heading toward southern France through the Little St. Bernard Pass. There seemed to be several thousand men and they were moving swiftly."

Wallace was on his feet. He dropped his cigarette, stepped on it, and stood thoughtfully by the window.

"I know what you're thinking. The same thing I am," Lathers said quietly.

"But that's impossible." Wallace whipped around. "I trust this man Hannibal. He doesn't run away from battles. He fights them."

"Yet," Lathers reminded him gently, "centuries ago he came through that pass from Spain. He may have de-

cidated that we were his enemies and retreated before we could organize our forces."

"Nuts," Snub said gruffly. "Those babies never ran away from anything."

Wallace drew his coat on hurriedly.

"That's what *I* think," he said. "Don't change any of your plans. Give me a plane that will drop me off just south of the chalet. I'll take three red rockets with me. If Hannibal is still there and ready to fight, I'll fire them all. He'll be ready to start when you are. Get that army of yours moving through every pass in the Alps."

"And if you don't succeed?"

"I will," Wallace answered grimly. "If I have to lick those Nazis myself, I'm going to cable my story of a victory before winter sets in."

THE high slopes above the chalet were dark and windswept. Wallace climbed swiftly and, without Snub to hold him back, found himself close to the green valley before dawn.

He stumbled forward in the gathering snow and was ready to cry with relief when Rudger's great voice boomed a greeting.

"Hooo!"

Wallace answered the shout weakly and staggered forward. Rudger's great arms were around him, helping him the last few steps to the safety of the cave.

"What brings you here?" Rudger's cherry red face was alight with curiosity. "Our Leader and his men are already hidden at their stations in the passes."

Relief surged through Wallace's tired mind.

"Then they didn't leave through the St. Bernard?"

Rudger's laugh came from his great belly. When at last he was quiet, his face became grave.

"Then you were fooled also?"

"Fooled? I don't understand."

"It was those Nazis," Rudger told him. "I guess that's what you call the stiff idiots who march stiffly and die in terror. Last night they must have seen our light. They have been troubled by us for months. Anyway, a huge army of them came up the pass and straight toward our hiding place. We could not hope to stop them if they managed to train their fire shooting weapons on our camp. Our Leader had a simpler plan to save his men. An hour before they arrived, he had torches tied to the heads of a thousand oxen. We drove them across the hills and into the pass. The Nazis followed. You should have seen them! I wonder how they felt today when they found they had chased our oxen all night long."

Again, Rudger roared with laughter.

Rex Wallace felt a warmth inside himself that made him want to give the big scoundrel, Rudger, a bear hug like Zeratin had done. Then the plans were intact. Hannibal was waiting for the signal to start.

He ripped open his pack quickly, lined up three large rockets on the snow and applied a match. Rudger watched him with wide, red eyes.

"What matter of magic is this?"

The first rocket left its tube, then the second and third. In the early morning light, three large blobs of bright red blossomed out over the snow covered pass, hung against the sky and faded. The lookouts in the valley ten miles below would be watching. Already the signal would be on the wire to Milan. General Lathers and his massive army were ready to march.

He turned to Rudger.

"Surely you don't have to stay here alone?"

Rudger grinned.

"I was to stay, so that if you returned, I could lead you to the pass

where Hannibal himself will lead his first three legions. The remainder of the army is distributed as you planned."

TOGETHER they started the strangest trek Wallace had ever made. Rudger, strong as an ox yet fast on his feet, led the way across the backbone of the range. They skirted deep valleys and many times Wallace caught glimpses of German outposts. Men who were clinging to small clefts in the rock, lying behind ready machine guns.

At last, close to noon, they halted. Rudger had led him deep into the enemy stronghold. Yet, up here where the snow was deep and heavy equipment could not come, no soldiers troubled them. Rudger halted several yards from the edge of a deep pass.

"We are safe here," he said.

They edged forward together. Wallace stopped suddenly, his head over the edge of the valley. A thousand yard drop, direct to the river bed, was before them. Down at the bottom of the cut were barricades of barbed wire. He realized just how well the Germans were prepared when he saw line upon line of pill boxes. Dozens of tanks and heavy guns were drawn into the valley.

"We will wait," Rudger said, and rolled lazily over on his back. "Our own men will be here soon."

The afternoon passed slowly. It was close to nightfall, and the sun had dropped until the valley below was in the shadows, when a sound came from behind him. It was the men of Hannibal. A small group of them came first with odd, wooden-wheeled machines that carried heavy boulders. These were pushed close to the cliff edge.

Then came the bowmen, dozens of them, like shadows against the snow. They carried long ropes looped about their waists. Their quivers were filled with arrows.

It was night now. Wallace could see the campfires burning below him. Armed sentries patrolled the open ground about the pill boxes. Nazi soldiers were sitting about, their rifles close.

"Wooooee!"

The faint, animal-like cry drifted up from the south end of the pass.

The place was suddenly alive with activity. First the bowmen, firing their arrows down the smooth walls directly into the German camp. The tips had been covered with fluffy blobs of cloth. Fire leaped from the arrows and the canyon was alight with the torches that sped down from above.

"This makes them soft," Rudger growled at his elbow.

Men were running forward to the cliff edge, pulling the carts. Wallace joined the mob, sweating behind the huge boulders. Tons of the rough granite went over the edge. When he again chanced a look below, the Nazi camp was in an uproar. They had not expected an attack from overhead. More than that, this was the first time they had tasted the burning arrows.

More torches were aflame now, but not on the cliff. The first legions of Hannibal were closing in. The Nazis had no heart to fight ghosts. Machine guns opened up with short, sharp bursts and then died out quickly. Hannibal's men swept into the camp, spears and arrows flying in a steady hail. The Leader himself was before his troops, his great sword sweeping death in wide swaths.

"This is no battle," Rudger spat his disgust. "They run before they fight."

IT WAS true. The Nazi General had died with a barbarian spear in his neck. No man in the pass wanted to meet a like fate from ghosts that haunted them from the past.

Tanks and equipment were moving swiftly north. In other passes, Wallace realized, the same thing was happening.

South, already in the canyons, Allied forces were on the way. Lathers' armies were rolling and would keep on rolling straight into Germany. Hannibal and his men struck terror into the Nazi troops. General John L. Lathers with his strongly armed, keen fighting-men of England and America would be ready to take over once the Nazis were clear of their fox holes in the mountains.

"In twenty-four hours the American troops have fought their way deep into the Alps," Wallace whispered to himself. His coming story was already writing itself in his mind. "Nothing will stop them now. We will enter Germany and occupied France as victors before the week is closed."

He paused, watching the men below fighting wildly, ever north, ever into the running hordes of Nazis.

"With the help of Hannibal of Carthage," he whispered, and then a broad grin crossed his face. "No, that wouldn't be so good. Some people would think the *Chicago Blade* needed a new foreign correspondent if I started telling of Hannibal at a time like this."

He turned to Rudger. The big warrior's face was covered with grime and sweat.

"I will return to the valley to report my story," he said. "After that I'm coming to thank Hannibal personally for what he has done."

Rudger took his hand, almost breaking it in his heavy grasp.

"Our Leader will conquer his foes by morning," he said gruffly. "His task is complete. I will take your message to him and he will be content. Now we will say goodbye."

"But, I'll see you tomorrow, or the

day following," Wallace insisted.

Rudger pointed far to the east. The blaze of burning equipment and the roar of tanks came faintly from St. Bernard Pass.

"The elephants march in the pass once more," he said softly. "We came with the thunder of their hoofs. Who knows what the morning will bring?"

CHAPTER XV

The Elephants March

REX WALLACE stood with Snub Edwards on the green valley bottom. The tents were still there but they flapped wildly in the wind. The storm dipped over the head of the pass and snow started wafting softly into the deserted camp.

Wallace trudged with heavy heart from one end of the camp to the other. The grass was beginning to turn brown and the battle flag that dipped from Hannibal's tent had already ripped loose and was lying on the frozen turf.

"The elephants marched through the pass last night," Wallace said suddenly.

"The tanks," Snub asked. "Do you really think the vibration brought them here and sent them away?"

Wallace led the way slowly toward the slave tent that Frances Boise had shared with Alixe.

"I like to think of it this way," he said.

"There was a mission for the gods to perform and that Hannibal has at last gone to a just reward for doing that job well."

He hesitated, leaned over and picked

a small sheet of note paper from the ground under the tent. It was covered with the neat, precise writing of a young girl.

"Papa Boise and I go with Zeratin," Wallace read aloud. "Where this strange army will finally drive its tent stakes, I cannot guess. Zeratin has asked me to be his wife and swears that no harm will come to us if we go with him. I am very proud of my Red Beard warrior. You need not worry about us.

Frances Boise."

The valley had grown cold and bleak as Wallace read the note. As they silently left the tent, snow touched his cheek and melted. The ground was white and snowflakes drifted down into great, fluffy blankets.

The wind grew stronger even as they reached the head of the valley. Looking back at the scene of utter desolation, Wallace bent his back to the coming storm.

"Where this army will finally drive its tent stakes, I do not know. . . ." He repeated the words softly.

Turning to Snub, he caught the solemn expression on the photographer's face

"Come on, soldier," he said loudly. "We're going to watch the American boys march into Berlin."

"Right!" Snub's voice was low and tense.

They traveled down the mountain side slowly, never looking back to where the banner of Hannibal disappeared forever beneath a soft blanket of snow.

THE END